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VETERANS CAUTIONED TO BE AWARE OF “PHISHING” SCAMS AFTER RECENT VA DATA THEFT

BISMARCK – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem cautions North Dakota’s veterans not to fall victim to “phishing” scams. Referring to the recent loss of data by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Stenehjem stated that his office has received reports from other states of attempts to obtain personal information from veterans.

The veterans reported that they had been contacted by an individual who claimed to be working with the Veterans Administration. The individual stated it was necessary for the veteran to “confirm” their date of birth and social security number, in order for the VA to determine whether that veteran’s information had been on the stolen database and to assist the veteran in recovering the information.

“The scam artists need this information so they can steal from the victim. To run up massive debts in the victim’s name, all the con artist needs is a date of birth and social security number,” said Stenehjem. “No legitimate government agency or official will ever contact you to confirm sensitive personal information. They don’t need to – they already have that information.”

The North Dakota Department of Veterans’ Affairs is working closely with the Consumer Protection division. Commissioner Bob Hanson said, “Our offices are working together to ensure that all North Dakota veterans understand how to protect their personal information. I urge all veterans to contact the consumer protection division if they have any questions or concerns about how to proceed.”

Parrell Grossman, director of the Consumer Protection Division, offered the following information:

- Never give out your social security number, date of birth, credit card number or other personal information over the telephone unless you initiated the call and you are sure it is a reputable company. Remember, government agencies will never call to ask you for this information.
- Do not respond to any e-mail asking you to provide or confirm personal information, or click on a link within an e-mail, even if it appears to come from the US Government. These e-mails use “copy cat” logos and the links go directly to the thief’s computer.
- Check your bank and credit card statements, phone and utility bills as soon as you get them. Report any discrepancies immediately and file a fraud alert or identity theft report.

Consumers can find a “Fraud Alert Request” letter and instructions on completing and filing the alert on the Attorney General’s website at www.ag.nd.gov, or by contacting the Consumer Protection division at 701-328-3404 or toll free at 1-800-472-2600.